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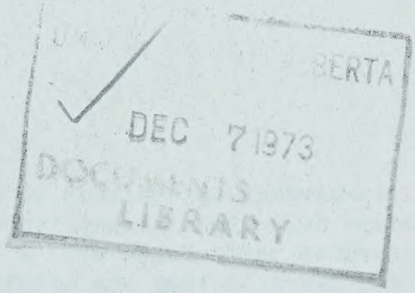
GERMAN YOUTH AND ADULTS VIEW INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY



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24 March 1948
ICD OPINION SURVEYS
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Berlin Germany

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Introduction ...

To probe comparative attitudes of German youth and adults on the issue of an individual's responsibility within a group, ICD Opinion Survey's staff of trained German interrogators interviewed a cross-section of over 1,000 adults and 2,000 young people in Amzon and the western sectors of Berlin. Interviews were conducted in late December 1947 and early January 1948. Because a large percentage of the respondents were children, the questions were presented in story form.

Summary ...

Few German youngsters between 10 and 12 consider an individual member of a club responsible for the actions of other club members. Asked if a boy should help pay for a window which other members of his club broke, four out of ten adults and half of those between 18 and 25 thought the boy should pay, but few younger children hold this opinion.

Of those interviewed, most said they would withdraw from group action in the event the club should decide to do something unethical. Young people between 18 and 25 and adults, particularly Berliners, are most likely to recommend that the boy take some positive steps in registering his disapproval of this action.

According to eight out of ten adults, the boy in question is guilty if he decides to "go along" with the group. Young children are less likely to think him guilty than are youths or adults.

[redacted]

Is a Club Member Responsible for Club's Activities? ...

German youngsters between 10 and 12 show noticeably less "gang spirit" than older youngsters and adults in their answers to the following question:

> "One day the boys (in the club) were playing ball and they broke a window. The next day, the owner of the window came and told them: 'You all have to chip in and pay for the window.' The boys then wondered what they should do about Kurt as he had been at home that day and hadn't played ball with them.
>
> What do you think: Should Kurt pay or not? " *

About one-fourth (23%) of the children between 10 and 12 thought Kurt should help pay. However, over half of the young people between 13 and 25, and 38% of the adults support this type of group responsibility.

In Bavaria, Hesse and Wuerttemberg-Baden, youth and adults tend to have about the same ideas on this question. The size of town that children between 10 and 12 live in seems to have little or no effect on their attitudes. But as the following table demonstrates, young people between 13 and 25 who live in large cities are considerably more conscious of group spirit than the same age group living in small towns.

	% saying Kurt should pay for window		
	10-12 years	13-25 years	26 and over
AMZON			
Towns under 5,000 population	24%	47%	36%
Between 5,000 & 250,000 pop.	23	50	40
Over 250,000	20	64	46
TOTAL	23%	51%	42%
Berlin	21%	59%	60%

Boys are slightly more ready to accept responsibility for group action than girls, People in higher socio economic levels, and those interested in lectures and reading, are, to some extent, more likely to say that Kurt should pay than are those lower on the socio-economic ladder, and those without the intellectual interests. Age, however, or conditioning, has more bearing on attitudes in this case than any other factor.

		Kurt should ...			
		Pay	Not Pay	Undecided	
Age:	10	15%	83%	2%	... 100%
	11	27	72	1	
	12	25	74	1	
	13	40	57	3	
	14	40	59	1	
	15	47	51	2	
	16-20	53	46	1	
	21-25	53	45	2	
	26 and over	38	58	4	

* When this and succeeding questions were asked of adults, they were asked what they would say to a youngster who was seeking advice on those issues.

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Former members of Hitler youth organizations appear to have more group consciousness than others. Of the children between 10 and 17 who had belonged to one of the Hitler groups, 48% say that Kurt should pay for the window. On the other hand, of the children in this age group who were not members of the Hitler organizations, 27% would hold Kurt liable.

... Informed children and adults ... in this case, those who know that Mr. Truman is president of the United States ... are more inclined to think that Kurt should help finance the new window than those who do not know.

	Of those who know Truman is President of the U.S. ...	Of those who don't know Truman is President ...
10-17 years	47% say Kurt should pay	29% say Kurt should pay
18-25 years	56% say Kurt should pay	48% say Kurt should pay
26 and over	44% say Kurt should pay	25% say Kurt should pay

Individual Responsibility Versus "Gang Spirit" ...

To explore another aspect of an individual's responsibility within a group, the following question was asked:

"Another time, the boys got the idea that they would steal a lamp from a man. The majority of the boys, including the leader, were for the idea. But one of the boys .. Rudi.. was opposed. He said: 'It won't do to steal a lamp. Rather we should wait until we can buy one.' But the other boys wouldn't listen to him, and now Rudi doesn't know what he should do.

What would you do if you were in Rudi's place? "

The largest number of those interviewed said that Rudi should not take part in this group project, and about one fourth of the Amzon adults and half of the Berliners recommended some form of direct action ... either getting out of the club, trying to prevent the others from stealing, or informing some one about the intended theft. A comparison of attitudes of Amzon residents and Berliners on this question follows:

	AMZON			BERLIN		
	10-17 years	18-25 years	26 & over	10-17 years	18-25 years	26 & over
Direct action:						
Would leave club	12%	19%	15%	12%	18%	17%
Try to prevent others from theft	4	8	8	9	22	15
Tell olders or others about it	6	5	6	19	12	15
	22%	32%	29%	40%	52%	47%
Would not take part	61	50	43	44	36	34
Wait and buy lamp	14	15	20	13	10	21
Would go along	2	4	2	3	4	1
Undecided	1	1	6	-	1	2
	100%	102%*	100%	100%	103%*	108%*

*some respondents gave more than one answer.

Some Advise Direct Action ...

Youngsters and adults who most frequently advise some form of direct action ... either leaving the club, trying to stop other club members, or informing someone ... are those in the middle socio-economic group; former members of Hitler youth clubs; those with a higher education; and those who keep up on things ... know the name of the U.S. president, read magazines and attend lectures.

	% advising some kind of direct action ... either leaving club, trying to stop others, or informing someone.		
	10-17 years	18-25 years	26 and over
Socio-economic group			
Upper middle	31%	48%	30%
Lower middle	22	33	34
Upper lower	21	30	29
Lower lower	19	17	10
Affiliation with Hitler Youth			
Former members	27%	33%	40%
No affiliation	17	23	28
Information			
Know name of U.S. president	26%	36%	33%
Do not know president	19	19	15
Read magazines	29%	43%	33%
Do not read magazines	20	26	27
Attend lectures	33%	47%	30%
Do not attend lectures	21	27	28

Responsibility and Age ...

As the following table shows, children 10 and 11 years old are least likely to say that if they were Rudi they would go so far as leave the club, try to prevent others from stealing, or tell someone about it.

	% advising some kind of direct action ... either leaving club; trying to stop others, or informing someone
Age: 10	13%
11	12
12	20
13	28
14	22
15	25
16 - 20	31
21 - 25	31
28 and over	29

Is Rudi Guilty? ...

To find out how German youth and adults would judge a boy who, against his own principles, went along with the group, the following question was asked:

> "Well, Rudi decided to go along with all the rest of the boys. But the boys were caught by the owner of the lamp and everyone was to be punished. Then Rudi said, 'That isn't right, because I was against it to begin with, but the others wouldn't listen to me.'
>
> What do you think -- was Rudi to blame or not? "

In Amzon, 80% of the children between 10 and 17, 85% of those between 18 and 25, and 79% of the adults considered Rudi guilty. Young people in Berlin between 18 and 25 almost unanimously (97%) gave the verdict "guilty." 81% of Berlin youngsters between 10 and 17 and 87% of the adults, said the boy was guilty.

As in the preceding question, a sense of responsibility for one's action appears to be at the lowest point among children. As the following table shows, a third of the ten-year old children do not consider the boy to blame for going along with the group.

	Guilty	Not Guilty	Undecided	
Years Old				
10	64%	33%	3%	...100%
11	77	22	1	
12	80	18	2	
13	86	13	1	
14	78	21	1	
15	86	11	3	
16	84	15	1	
17	89	11	-	
18 - 25	85	13	2	
26 & over	79	16	5	

... Youth and adults who say in greatest numbers that Rudi is guilty are those in the higher socio-economic groups, former members of the Hitler youth, those having higher education, and those who know the name of the U.S.president ... read youth magazines, attend lectures.

	% saying Rudi is guilty		
	10-17 years	18-25 years	26 and over
Socio-economic level			
Upper middle	86%	92%	85%
Lower middle	85	87	83
Upper lower	81	86	79
Lower lower	65	75	69
Affiliation with Hitler Youth			
Former members	86%	87%	90%
No affiliation	76	78	79
Information			
Know name of U.S.President	86%	87%	84%
Do not know President	62	79	71
Read youth magazines	85	88	91
Do not read youth magazines	79	85	78
Attend lectures	88	93	80
Do not attend lectures	80	83	78

... The attitudes expressed here skirt those on the broader question of the collective responsibility of the German people for the Hitler regime. Rudi, it could be said, is the prototype of "der kleine Mann" that is the majority German. But attitudes toward the two are quite different.

Thus, Rudi who first protests but then goes along with the club in a theft gets little or no popular support for his plea of innocence. In contrast, very few Germans will agree that the German people share collective guilt because they permitted a war-minded government to come into power. This question has been frequently repeated: "Do you think the German people are responsible for the war because they permitted a government to come into power which sought to plunge the world into war?" Always, about seven in ten have answered, "No."

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